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## THE PORTRAITURE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT: A TERRACOTTA HEAD IN MUNICH.

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### I.

The portraiture of Alexander III of Macedon has long been one of the vexed questions of ancient iconography; a circumstance the stranger from the historical certainty that the royal lineaments were often portrayed. Nor was this done mechanically or perfunctorily, as may have been the case with such worthies as Demetrios of Phaleron or Hadrian (Pausanias, I, 18. 6): but in such fashion, and by artists so famous, that a history of Greek art would be incomplete without a consideration of the types thus created.

Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* VII, 37. 125) reports the tradition about a decree of Alexander, granting to Apelles, Pyrgoteles, and Lysippos, a monopoly of the reproduction of his features, within the limits of the art that was the peculiar domain of each: painting, gem-cutting, and bronze statuary. This is sufficiently distinct. The corroborative passages that have been collected<sup>1</sup> are less exact. In particular, the Greek writers express themselves in a way that does not tend to sustain the hypothesis, that Alexander actually promulgated a decree on so trivial a matter. It has been severally conjectured, that these artists were appointed his official portraitists, court-painters, as it were; that he refused to sit to any others; and that only these three were honored with his own orders. We learn of too many portraits by other eminent painters and sculptors to admit for a moment that the privilege was actually an exclusive one. The most noteworthy circumstance is the striking omission of any reference to sculpture or sculptors proper, the "stone-scrapers" (*λεθοξόδοι*) of archaic art; more especially when a branch of art so subordinate as gem-cutting is made so prominent. In another passage (XXXVII, 8), Pliny restricts the privilege accorded to the gem-cutter to the use, in the portraiture of Alexander, of the

<sup>1</sup> Brunn's *Geschichte der griech. Künstler*, I, p. 363; II, pp. 209, 489: Overbeck's *Schriftquellen*, Nos. 1446 sqq.

emerald, or the stone the ancients knew by that name. Very probably, but one was ever engraved with his patron's profile by Pyrgoteles, who owes to this anecdote a celebrity his title to which is very dubious, since nothing further is known of him, or of works by his hand. Yet his name has been used as the personification of ancient glyptics by a modern authority on this subject;<sup>2</sup> and an elementary handbook by a distinguished French archæologist, of which an English version has lately been issued, places this relatively obscure artist at the very head of all Greek gem-cutters.<sup>3</sup> A fine sardonyx cameo, signed ΠΥΡΓΟΤΕΛΗΣ, and representing Alexander wearing on his head a lion's mask, was published by Stosch (*Gemm. ant. cael.* t. LV) in the last century, but need not further engage our attention, inasmuch as it was declared a forgery by Bracci (*Mem. degli antichi incisori*, II, p. 184) and by Winckelmann (*Mon. ant. ined.*, I, p. LXXVII). Suetonius tells of an intaglio-head of Alexander used as a signet by Augustus. No mention of an illustrious engraver is made in his casual notice, but it is a safe presumption that none but a stone cut by some exceedingly skilful lapidary would have enjoyed this marked preference of the imperial virtuoso: indeed, it is much more likely that a fine antique gem took his princely fancy, than that he deliberately chose to publish his admiration for a character and a career that were quite the antithesis of his own.

Of Apelles, Pliny (xxxv, 93) says, broadly, that it is superfluous to enumerate how often he painted both Alexander and Philip. His career, begun in the reign of Philip, did not reach its close until long after Alexander's, with which its culmination was coincident. He flourished, says Pliny (xxxv, 79), in the cxii Olympiad (332–328 B. C.). Chief among this artist's portraits of Alexander was one at Ephesos, treasured in the temple of Artemis; the one for which he was paid twenty talents in gold, the money being measured to him, not counted. Cicero refers to it (*in Verr.* iv, 60. 135) as a treasure the Ephesians could not be induced to part with; and its preëminence gave rise to this rather weak epigram: "There are two Alexanders, the invincible, by Philip, and the inimitable, by Apelles."<sup>4</sup> As a portrait, nevertheless, it was a failure. The hero was figured after the type of the god

<sup>2</sup> Krause, *Pyrgoteles, oder die Steine der Alten*, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> "Gem-cutting attained perfection in Pyrgoteles, who engraved the seal of Alexander." Collignon, *A Manual of Greek Archæology*, translated by J. H. Wright: New York and London, 1886, p. 338.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch, *De Alexandri M. seu virtute seu fortuna*, 2.

Zeus, holding a thunderbolt. Lysippos, the sculptor, blamed Apelles, the painter, severely and justly (though perhaps with a rival's pique at the twenty talents) for giving to a mortal this divine attribute: saying that he himself had given to his statue only a spear, the true and appropriate glory of which no time would take away (Plut., *de Isid. et Osirid.*, 24). The attribute chosen by Apelles entailed more direct neglect of individual feature on account of the brown and dusky color he had to give his hero in order to furnish a suitable contrast to the painted lightning: Plutarch (*Vita Alexandri*, 4) notes how contrary this was to actuality, since Alexander's skin was of a rare whiteness, with a ruddy glow about the breast and face. Apparently, the artistic reason escaped him. This celebrated picture by the prince of technic, who added ivory-black to the painter's palette,<sup>5</sup> and first discovered the application of vitreous varnish (Plin. *H. N.* xxxv, 97), must have possessed some of the qualities we moderns most readily associate with the name of Rembrandt: *enargeia* and *krasis*, which words, in this context, I shall render by the terms *relief* and *warmth*, so familiar in our artists' vernacular, are the qualities Plutarch ascribes to it.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, where a single commendation of a particular excellence has been handed down, it is not any characteristic feature or expression that is mentioned, but it is that the thunderbolt or lightning, and the fingers that held it, seemed to stand out from the picture-plane (Plin. *H. N.* xxxv, 92). Brunn,<sup>7</sup> endeavoring to place the Kolophonian master, aptly alludes to a certain analogy between the type of a reigning conqueror he embodied, and David d'Angers' renowned painting of "Bonaparte crossing the Alps."

The analogy of two other compositions by Apelles, with Alexander as the principal figure, bears out Brunn's comparison: these paintings Augustus hung in a chief place in his forum. Purely allegorical, they represented Alexander on a triumphal car driven by Victory and escorted, like a second Sun-god, by Kastor and Polydeukes, stars of the morning and evening, or accompanied by a personification of Triumph and driving War before him with hands tied on his back. Claudius cut out Alexander's face from both paintings, and had the features of Augustus substituted.<sup>8</sup> If this was madness, there was method in it. Personality, in these compositions, was immaterial, was an accident.

<sup>5</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxv, 42: *Apelles commentus est ex ebore combusto facere atramentum, quod elephantinum vocatur.*

<sup>6</sup> *De Alexandri M. s. virtute s. fortuna*, 2.

*Geschichte der griech. Künstler*, II, p. 219.

<sup>8</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxv, 93, 94.

Quite opposite, as his criticism of Apelles indicated, was the method of portraiture adopted by the third of the preferred artists, Lysippos of Sikyon. His many portraits of Alexander, in a series that opened with the conqueror's boyhood,<sup>9</sup> and what Pliny (*H. N.* xxxiv, 37) styles the "inexplicable multitude" of the bronzes with which he flooded the cities of Hellas, identified his time with the historical period known as the age of Alexander.<sup>10</sup> Famous above all was the figure with the spear, the same contrasted by himself with the fulminant ideal conceived by Apelles.<sup>11</sup> Epigrammatists<sup>12</sup> celebrated the master-stroke that made a very deformity singularly expressive of the subject's actual character of haughty ambition, no less than the equally characteristic leonine fierceness of the eyes. Every schoolboy knows that Alexander's head inclined slightly towards the left shoulder: he was afflicted with that flaw of muscular anatomy known to physicians as *torti collis*, which consists in a shortness of one of the great sternocleido-mastoid muscles of the neck. These muscles, when they normally contract simultaneously, bend the neck forward; but, when they pull singly on the mastoid process of the temporal bone, each turns the head to the opposite side,<sup>13</sup> as a rudder is turned by its yoke-lines. Other sculptors had rendered this defect, together with the sparkle and lustre of Alexander's eyes,<sup>14</sup> without attaining to that expressiveness of form and feature which revealed his true individuality, or *ethos*. Their statues were like certain of his companions and successors, who affected a moist eye and a mimetic droop of the head, without, somehow, becoming more impressive for this. One Stasikrates, whom Tzetzes contrasts with Lysippos,<sup>15</sup> gained no credit with his patron by suppressing physical defects which his rival had honestly rendered.

No other single statue of Alexander by Lysippos is specifically mentioned. Two elaborate compositions,—the Squadron of Alexander at the battle on the Granikos, and Alexander's Hunt wrought by Lysippos in conjunction with Leochares,—recall the hunts and battle-pieces

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxiv, 63.

<sup>10</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxiv, 51; cxiii. (Olympiade) *Lysippus fuit, cum et Alexander Magnus*.

<sup>11</sup> Citations collected by Overbeck, *Antike Schriftquellen*, 1479–1484, s. n. *Lysippos*.

<sup>12</sup> Poseidippos, *Anthologia Graeca*, II, 50. 14, et al.; Archelaos, *Anth. Gr.* II, 57. 1, et al.

<sup>13</sup> See Duval's *Artistic Anatomy*, ch. xxiii; Baumeister's *Denkmäler des klassischen Altertums*, s. n. *Alexander der Grosse*.

<sup>14</sup> τῶν ὀμμάτων τὴν διάχυσιν καὶ ὑγρότητα, Plut. *de Al. M. seu virt. seu fortuna*, II. 2; Solinus (c. 15) describes him as *lætis oculis et illustribus*.

<sup>15</sup> Overbeck, No. 1484.

of Assyrian kings on the bas-reliefs of Nimrūd and Khorsabad. And one may conjecture they were inspired by those carved histories. Like them, they chronicled actual events. How very Assyrian are the bronze hounds, the lion at close quarters with the king, and Krateros, one of his noble attendants<sup>16</sup> coming to his aid, figures of which Plutarch tells! Krateros had dedicated the group at Delphoi.<sup>17</sup> Another group representing Alexander's Hunt, the work of the artist's son Euthykrates, existed at Thespiæ.<sup>18</sup> The Squadron, transported by Metellus Macedonicus from Dion to Rome, contained twenty-five equestrian figures, besides that of Alexander himself [and nine foot soldiers?]. This battle-piece also was reproduced by Euthykrates for the city of Thespiæ, with how much or little fidelity cannot be known.<sup>19</sup> Such compositions are not of necessity iconic, yet Plutarch informs us that, in the Hunt, the noble near to the King (Krateros), the lion and the hounds, were portraits; and that the twenty-five horsemen in the Squadron were individual portraits of those of Alexander's companions that fell in the cavalry charge on the Granikos.<sup>20</sup>

We have seen that Leochares of Athens was associated with Lysippos of Sikyon in the production of the quasi-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt. Leochares was the elder of the two sculptors, an adept in various plastic technics and, like the other, a born portraitist. Alexander had sat to both of them in his boyhood. Long before any privilege in regard to the royal portrait could have been granted, the Athenian master executed Philip's commission for the gold and ivory portraits seen by Pausanias (v, 20. 9) in the Philippeion at Olympia. The young crown-prince figured here in a family series, with his father, mother, and grandparents. To the earliest period of Alexander's fame, or the seven years between the battle of Chaironeia and his accession, must be ascribed, in general, such paintings and statues as formed pendants to portraits of Philip, or grouped the son with the father. A picture of Alexander "still a boy," by Antiphilos, hung in the portico of Philip at Rome. The date is thus fixed of a painting of the goddess Athena with Philip and Alexander, by the same

<sup>16</sup> Overbeck, 1485-1491.

<sup>17</sup> Plut. *Alex. M.* 40.

<sup>18</sup> To quote but one example from antiquity, the recovered Hermes with the infant Dionysos, of Praxiteles, was similarly identical in subject with a work of his father, and probably a free copy.

<sup>19</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxiv, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxiv, 64; Arrian. *Anab.* i, 16. 7; Plut. *Al. M.* 16; Vell. Pat. i, 11. 3; Justinus xi, 6. 13 (corrupt: for *centum XX equites* read *circum*).

artist, which was shown to strangers in the portico of Octavia.<sup>21</sup> To the same category belong a couple of portrait-statues, Philip and Alexander again, by Chaireas, and Euphranor's bronze chariots, in which each was figured standing, and drawn by four horses.<sup>22</sup>

The list of contemporary portraits of Alexander that I have given, is certainly long enough (especially if it be borne in mind that only noted canvasses and statues were recorded by our authorities) to dispel any lingering illusions concerning the effectiveness of the prohibitory decree: yet, even two additional numbers, and these denoting the work of no mean hands, will probably fail to make it quite complete. Nikias, best remembered, in spite of his success in ambitious pictorial composition, as the limner of Praxiteles, was the author of "an excellent Alexander" seen by Pliny (*H. N.* xxxv, 131) in the portico of Pompey. Protogenes, whom Apelles advised to paint the deeds of the great Emathian conqueror, as subjects destined to live forever, probably did not consider the proposition flattering to his talent; he preferred, as a rule, to show the power of his brush in the broader field of genre subjects, but threw off a fanciful group of Alexander and Pan.<sup>23</sup> The sensible charm of such a subject, the underlying thought of which would not be more than a play on words to us, must, I cannot help thinking, have lain mainly in the possibilities it afforded for idyllic treatment, and but subordinately in the opportunity for the display of the artist's consummate skill in technical elaboration.<sup>24</sup>

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[*To be continued.*]

<sup>21</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxv, 114.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* xxxiv, 75, 78.

<sup>23</sup> Plin. *H. N.* xxxv, 106.

<sup>24</sup> For a different opinion, see Brunn, *Geschichte der griech. Künstler*, II, pp. 239, 240.